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IQBAL'S POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY

Mazheruddin Siddiqi

Different views have been held about the political philosophy of Iqbāl. Some opponents of Iqbāl put forward the claim that he was the exponent of Fascism, because in one place he has expressed great admiration for Mussolini. Even otherwise, Iqbāl is an admirer of strong leadership and praises men of a dynamic type who are self-possessed and of firm determination. Iqbāl calls them sometimes *Mard-e-Qalandar*, sometimes *Mard-e Ḥur* and sometimes *Mard-e Mu'min*. On the other hand, there are some people who think that Iqbāl was a socialist, because he is opposed to capitalism and condemns it in no uncertain terms in his poetry. For example, he says:-

گیا دور سرمایہ داری گیا تماشا دکھا کر مداری گیا

In other place he says:-

اٹھو میری دنیا کے غریبوں کو جگا دو کاخ امراء کے درو دیوار ہلا دو

But in our opinion both these groups of people have failed to understand Iqbāl. Both of them overlook the fact that the philosophy of Iqbāl is an integral whole with many facets. A great poet's or writer's political philosophy should not be studied in isolation from the general trend of his thought as embodied in all his works. If one wants to understand Iqbāl's political philosophy, one should keep in mind all the aspects of Iqbāl's poetry and philosophy. It is a serious mistake to derive Iqbāl's political philosophy from a few casual remarks.

According to Iqbāl, Islam, as a polity, seeks to give practical expression to the principle of *Tauḥīd*. "It demands loyalty to God, not to

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thrones. And since God is the ultimate spiritual basis of all life, loyalty to God virtually amounts to man's loyalty to his own ideal nature".[1]

Iqbāl thus declares himself against all forms of state worship, whether Fascistic or Communistic. He gives the individual the right to differ from the views of the state. This argument is also supported by the statement of Iqbāl in which he says,[2] : "Islam as a system of emotional unification recognises the worth of the individual as such and rejects blood-relationship as the basis of human unity". Thus Iqbāl also declares himself against narrow territorial nationalism, a point which we shall discuss later.

As far as the worth of the individual is concerned, Iqbāl rejects every social system as unhealthy which provides no scope for the development of a free personality. For example, he opposes over-organization and in his lectures he criticises the Muslim Jurists for hampering the free individuality of Muslims by trying to create an over-organized society. He writes:[3]

> "Their leading idea was social order and there is no doubt that they were partly right, because organization does to a certain extent counteract the forces of decay. But they did not see and our modern *'Ulamā'* do not see that the ultimate fate of a people does not depend so much on organization as on the worth and power of the individual. In an over-organized society the individual is altogether crushed out of existence. He gains the whole world around him and loses his own soul".

In the same passage he says that the only effective pover which counteracts the forces of decay in a society is the rearing of self concentrated individuals. Such individuals alone, he adds, reveal the depths of life. They disclose new standards in the light of which we begin to see that our environment is not wholly inviolable and requires revision.

Indeed, individuality is so central to the philosophy of Iqbāl that he even conceives of God as an individual, unique and peerless.[4] God, conceived of as some vast, vague and pervasive element does not appeal to Iqbāl and for this very reason he is opposed to pantheism which destroys God's individuality.

According to Iqbāl, God's individuality is further supported by the fact that the Qur'ān gives Him the proper name of Allāh. He further

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quotes the Qur'ānic verse in which God is described as the light of the heavens and the earth. He says that the opening sentence of the verse gives the impression of an escape from the individualistic conception of God. But the sentences which follow give just the opposite impression. The development of the metaphor, he adds,[5] is meant rather to exclude the suggestion of a formless cosmic element by centralizing the light in a flame which is further individualised by its encasement in a glass. This shows that Iqbāl does not like a society in which the liberty of the individual is unsafe and his personality is hedged round by vexatious restrictions. It is true that individuality cannot be allowed to run riot and the principle of individual liberty can not be pushed too far without stultifying itself. If no restrictions are placed on the liberty of the individual, society will be riven with conflict and the danger of its disintegration will loom large. But this does not justify the other extreme where the state becomes the arbiter of the individual's destiny and stamps out his free personality. In any organization of society the self-hood (*khudī*) of the individual should be adequately preserved. Iqbāl entertains deep respect for the unique individual and says in a letter to Nicholson, "The Kingdom of God on earth means the democracy of more or less unique individuals , presided over by the most unique individual on the earth".

Thus Iqbāl upholds democracy in the political field. It is true that in one of his poems, contrary to his general trend of thought, Iqbāl has condemned democracy. In this poem he says:-

گریز از طرز جمهوری غلامی پخته کارے شو

که از مغز دوصد خر فکرانسا نے نمی آید

As we have said above, this verse conflicts with the general political philosophy of Iqbāl. Therefore, we should go deeper into the matter and see what Iqbāl . really desires. If closer consideration is given to the matter, it will become apparent that Iqbāl is opposed not to democracy as such but to political pover falling into the hands of ignorant, illiterate and unwise persons. It seems that Iqbāl was mainly influenced in this by his own political environment. During his life, representative institutions were dominated by the idle rich, the ignorant feudal lords and it was impossible for a philosopher or even a high intellectual to come out successful in the

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elections. With this situation in mind, Iqbāl denounces the chiefs, feudals and landlords and calls them "two hundred asses". But this condemnation of Iqbāl relates only to a specific form of democracy. One of the great virtues of democracy is that it is able to remove its own defects, as it is a self -correcting mechanism. If intellectuals and men of high political calibre are required to run the machine of the government, the electoral machinery may be suitably amended, the principles and modes of representation can be revised and constitutional provisions may be included to see to it that wealth and property does not exercise undue influence in the elections. This sort of self-correction is not possible in any other form of government except democracy.

If the above verse gives the impression that Iqbāl was opposed to democracy, the following statement[7] of Iqbāl about Islamic democracy may be taken as a more authentic account of his viewpoint:-

> "After considering these points, we will have to recognise that from the very beginning Islam had acknowledged the principle that in reality and for all practical purposes the Muslim Community is the repository of political power and not any particular individual. It is true that the electors by their free vote and agreed decision vest this power in an individual in whom they have full confidence and whom they consider to be well-qualified to exercise political power. But the assumption of political power by such an individual does not entitle him to any superiority in the *Sharī'a* (law of Islam). In the eyes of the *Sharī'a* he occupies the same position as any other ordinary Muslim. He will exercise no authority on those whom he represents except in so far as he enforces the constitution laid down by the *Sharī'a*. The conclusion which we arrive at is that in Islam legislation is based after the clear commands of the *Sharī'a* on the agreement of opinion in the Muslim Community".

When Iqbāl admits that in Islam the opinions of the mass of the people are the basis of legislation after the clear commands of the *Sharī'a*, how can it be said that he was opposed to democracy.

As regards territorial nationalism, we have already hinted above that Iqbāl is opposed to this form of nationalism. This is quite natural because if the Islamic polity is an objectification of the principle of *Tauḥīd*,

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as Iqbāl says, it must seek to demolish rather than strengthen the walls which divide one portion of humanity from another. Iqbāl takes up this theme in his poem, "The Mysteries of selflessness',[8] where he says:-

Our Master, fleeing from his fatherland,
Resolved the knot of Muslim nationhood.
His wisdom founded one community,
The world its parish.

In another place he says:-

جوهر ما با مقامے بسته نیست ـ باده تندش بجامے بسته نیست
هندی و چینی سفال جام ماست ـ رومی و شامی گل اندام ماست
قلب ما از هند و روم و شام نیست ـ مرز.بو م او بجز اسلام نیست

Writing on this subject, Iqbāl further says,[9]

"The Divine *Sharī'a* does not recognise the distinctions of nationality and race which outwardly seem to be quite natural. Neither does it pay any heed to the historical differences of various nationalities. The ultimate objective of Islam is that a new community having all necessary perfections and excellences should be brought into existence out of the free intermixture of races and nationalities. Political progress in Islam does not end up in a racial or territorial community, because the fundamental principles of the Islamic community rest on human nature in general and not on the racial characteristics of any particular nation. The internal bonds of a community like this one can not be based on geographical and racial unity, neither on linguistic and cultural traditions and experiences".

Thus the political philosophy of Iqbāl may be summed up in his belief that the individual human personality deserves to be respected and that territorial nationalism based on the narrow concepts of race, geography or colour is opposed to the teachings of Islam.

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NOTES

1. Iqbāl, *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam,* Lahore, 1962, p. 147.
2. Iqbāl, *Ibid.*
3. Iqbāl, *Reconstruction, op. cit.,* p. 151.
4. Iqbāl, *Ibid.,* pp. 62, 63.
5. Iqbāl, *Ibid.,* p. 63.
6. *The Secrets of the Self,* tr. R.A. Nicholson, Lahore, 1960. See Introduction, p. XXXVIII.
7. S.A. Vahid: *Maqālāt-e Iqbāl,* Lahore, 1963, pp. 88, 89.
8. A.J. Arberry, *The Mysteries of selflessness,* London, n.d. p. 30.
9. S.A. Vahid: *op. cit.,* pp. 90, 91.

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